UNITED
NATIONS

EP

Governing Council
of the United Nations
Environment Programme

Distr.
GENERAL

UNEP/GC.20/17
16 December 1998

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Twentieth session
Nairobi, 1-5 February 1999
Item 7 of the provisional agenda*

LINKAGES AMONG AND SUPPORT TO ENVIRONMENTAL AND ENVIRONMENT-RELATED CONVENTIONS

Programmatic support provided by the United Nations Environment Programme to environmental conventions

Report of the Executive Director

Summary

This report describes the support of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to environmental and environment-related conventions, particularly those which held conferences of their parties in 1998. The functional restructuring of UNEP in accordance with the Nairobi Declaration on the Role and Mandate of the United Nations Environment Programme, adopted on 7 February 1997, has enhanced its ability to provide value additional programmatic support to the substantive work of the conventions in the following areas: assessment and monitoring; policy development; environmental law; development and application of economic instruments and tools for environmental management; development of methodologies and guidelines; information and public awareness; integrated environmental planning and management; technology transfer; and corresponding implementation of pilot projects. The Governing Council may wish to consider endorsing a more proactive role for UNEP, especially in regard to providing programmatic support for catalysing, first, collaboration among conventions in thematic areas of common concern and, second, the elements in the programmes of work of conventions that are complementary to the areas of concentration of the restructured environment programme.

---

* UNEP/GC.20/1.

K9800150 241298 /...

For reasons of economy, this document is printed in a limited number. Delegates are kindly requested to bring their copies to meetings and not to request additional copies.

Suggested action by the Governing Council

The Governing Council may wish to adopt a decision along the following lines:

Bearing in mind United Nations General Assembly resolution S-19/2 of 28 June 1997, on the Programme for the Further Development of Agenda 21, and its decision 52/445 of 18 December 1997, on progress in the implementation of conventions relating to sustainable development,

Bearing in mind also Governing Council decisions 19/1 of 7 February 1997, on the Nairobi Declaration on the Role and Mandate of the United Nations Environment Programme and SS.V/2 of 22 May 1998, on the revitalization, reform and strengthening of the United Nations Environment Programme,

Having considered the reports of the Executive Director on, programmatic support from the United Nations Environment Programme to environmental conventions (UNEP/GC.20/17), strengthening the role of the United Nations Environment Programme in promoting collaboration among conventions (UNEP/GC.20/16), and, promoting interlinkages among global environmental issues and human needs (UNEP/GC.20/40),

1. Encourages the Executive Director to enter into arrangements with environmental conventions and their secretariats for the provision to the United Nations Environment Programme of technical and scientific expertise in support of their respective programmes of work;

2. Requests the relevant conventions and their secretariats to explore with the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme areas of cooperation in support of the implementation of their respective programmes of work, taking into account the scientific and technical expertise contained in the United Nations Environment Programme;

3. Urges the conferences of parties to environmental conventions to support the establishment of programmatic interlinkages between the programmes of work of their conventions and the United Nations Environment Programme;

4. Requests the Executive Director to report to the Governing Council at its twenty-first session on the steps taken to implement the present decision.

I. BACKGROUND

1. Over the past decade, UNEP has contributed significantly at the global, regional and national levels to the implementation of global environmental conventions, such as the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer (1985) and the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer (1987), the Convention on Biological Diversity (1992), the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (1992), the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Drought and/or Desertification particularly in Africa (1994) and, to a lesser extent, to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (1973), the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (1979) and the Basel Convention on the Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal (1989).

2. Similarly, UNEP has supported regional conventions, including the Lusaka Agreement on Cooperative Enforcement Operations Directed at Illegal Trade in Flora and Fauna (1994) and a number of regional seas conventions.

3. The latter include: the Barcelona Convention for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea against Pollution (1976), the Kuwait Regional Convention for Cooperation on the Protection of the Marine Environment from Pollution (1978), the Lima Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and Coastal Area of the South-East Pacific (1981), the Abidjan Convention for Cooperation in the Protection and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the West and Central African Region (1981), the Regional Convention for the Conservation of the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden Environment (1982), the Cartagena Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment of the Wider Caribbean Region (1983), the Convention for the Protection of the Natural Resources and Environment of the South Pacific Region (1986), and the Nairobi Convention for the Protection, Management and Development of the Coastal and Marine Environment in the Eastern African Region (1985). Since the initial negotiation of these conventions, UNEP continues to provide technical, scientific, and, when appropriate, financial support to their programmes of work.

4. UNEP deployed its scientific and technical expertise for convening and facilitating negotiations that led to the signing of eight global and twelve regional environmental conventions and related international agreements, 1/ and is currently assisting the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee that is working on the development of a global legally binding instrument on persistent organic pollutants (POPs). During the early years of these conventions and agreements, UNEP continued to nurture their development and implementation by providing needed scientific and technical support with the corresponding financial assistance. Longer-term programmatic support has been particularly necessary in the case of the regional seas conventions and action plans, as well as the Lusaka Agreement, whose Parties consist primarily of developing countries. The financial crisis that faced the organization from 1995 to 1997, resulted, however, in a dramatic reduction in

---

1/ Included among the eight global conventions and agreements is the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-Based Activities, a soft legal instrument that is implemented largely through the regional seas conventions and action plans.

programmatic support to environmental conventions, particularly to the more vulnerable regional seas conventions in Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa and Asia.

5. The scientific linkages underpinning environmental conventions and the imperative of holistic, integrated approaches to the protection of the environment call for deliberate actions by the governing bodies and secretariats of UNEP and multilateral environmental agreements to foster programmatic collaboration.

II. UNEP PROGRAMMATIC SUPPORT TO ENVIRONMENTAL CONVENTIONS

6. UNEP has an extensive track record in providing programmatic support to global and regional environmental conventions. It is not possible in this paper to detail all of these contributions for all global and regional environmental conventions. The following paragraphs, highlight some of the programmatic support that UNEP has provided to four global conventions and to the regional seas conventions and action plans, and which is indicative of the kind of support it is capable of contributing in the future.

7. Support in promoting public awareness and in disseminating information on global conventions is provided by the UNEP Information Unit on Conventions (IUC) to conventions such as those on biological diversity, climate change and desertification.

8. UNEP also supports the broad spectrum of conventions by providing legal advice to Governments on the development of complementary national legislation for meeting their obligations under those conventions. A considerable amount of work has been undertaken in this area in Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, and Asia and the Pacific.

A. Convention on Biological Diversity

9. There have been a number of major initiatives undertaken by UNEP in support of the Convention on Biological Diversity since it entered into force in 1994. These include, inter alia, the following:

(a) Preparation of guidelines for national biodiversity planning in collaboration with the World Resources Institute (WRI) and IUCN - the World Conservation Union;

(b) Assisting Governments in the preparation of biodiversity country studies, strategies and action plans;

(c) Preparation of the Global Biodiversity Assessment;

(d) Strengthening of national capacities through the Biodiversity Data Management project funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF);

(e) Organization of the Global Biodiversity Forums with IUCN and WRI;

(f) Development and application of the UNEP International Technical Guidelines for Safety in Biotechnology;

(g) GEF-funded Pilot Biosafety Enabling Activity Project, consisting of 18 national biosafety projects and eight regional workshops on biosafety;

(h) Development and implementation of related environmental law training activities;

(i) Harmonization of national environmental legislation; and

(j) Provision of support through the inter-organizational Ecosystem Conservation Group (UNEP/FAO/UNESCO/IUCN). 2/

B. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

10. One of the major contributions by UNEP was the establishment, jointly with the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). IPCC assesses the state of existing knowledge about the science of climate change; the environmental, economic and social impacts of climate change; and possible response strategies. The assessments of IPCC are presented for the consideration of the Parties of the Framework Convention on Climate Change. UNEP is responsible for Thrust 3 on climate impact assessments and response strategies of the Climate Agenda established in 1993 under the inter-agency World Climate Programme. It is also an active partner in the Global Climate Observing Systems (GCOS) and the Global Terrestrial Observing System (GTOS), that contribute to the Framework Convention by providing scientific information about climate change.

11. Other important initiatives by UNEP include:

(a) Development and testing of methodologies on impact assessment and adaptation, inventories of greenhouse gases, and mitigation;

(b) Building dialogue on activities implemented jointly (AIJ) and the flexible mechanisms under the Kyoto Protocol, specifically the clean development mechanism;

(c) Preparation by IUC of the Climate Awareness Programme for the consideration of GEF for funding;

(d) GEF-funded National Communications Support Programme with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP);

(e) Capacity-building in Africa through the UNEP Climate Impacts and Response Strategies Network; and

(f) Financial services initiative involving the insurance and banking sectors that is examining the possible impacts of climate change and the need for policy revisions.

C. United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

2/ A more detailed account of these initiatives may be found in the report UNEP: A Partner in the Implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity, that was made available at the fourth meeting of the Conference of Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in May 1998 in Bratislava.

12. One of the major contributions by UNEP to the Convention to Combat Desertification was the publication in 1997 of the second edition of the World Atlas of Desertification. UNEP has been selected to host the Convention's Regional Coordination Unit for Latin America and the Caribbean, which will be co-located at the UNEP Regional Office in Mexico City. Other contributions to the Convention include:

(a) Country projects in support of the Convention in the Commonwealth of Independent States;

(b) Development of national action programmes;

(c) Training courses in desertification control;

(d) Public awareness-raising;

(e) Promoting subregional cooperation, including action programmes;

(f) GEF-funded project on People, Land Management and Environmental Change, that focuses on conservation of agrodiversity in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, and South and Central America;

(g) Two other GEF-funded projects on conserving biological diversity in selected arid and semi-arid areas of Africa; and

(h) Support to the development of a global network of organizations to support the implementation of the convention. 3/

D. The Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer and the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer

13. UNEP support to the Vienna Convention and the Montreal Protocol is effected largely through its OzonAction programme. This programme, which is funded by the Multilateral Fund for the Implementation of the Montreal Protocol, supports the phase-out of ozone-depleting substances in developing countries through its clearing-house and capacity-building services. It does this by building up local expertise in developing countries, through the provision of information and management tools and by promoting low-cost phase-out of ozone-depleting substances without major investment costs. By the end of 1997, capacity-building was under way in seven regional networks, and 78 country programmes were being implemented.

E. Regional seas conventions and action plans

14. Eleven regional seas conventions and action plans have been negotiated with the help of UNEP, and two others are currently in the process of negotiation. UNEP programmatic support to these conventions and action plans includes:

(a) Development of regional seas action plans;

3/ Further details of these initiatives may be found in the report of the Executive Director on support for the implementation of the Convention (UNEP/GC.20/11).

(b) Development of complementary national plans;

(c) Capacity-building in various aspects of coastal and marine management;

(d) Regional networking of institutions in support of regional seas programmes;

(e) Capacity-building in regional seas planning and management;

(f) Capacity-building in and support to monitoring and assessment of marine pollution;

(g) Provision of legal advisory services in the development of protocols to conventions on subjects such as oil spills, specially protected areas and wildlife, and pollution from land-based activities;

(h) Provision of legal advisory services to Governments for the development of complementary national legislation; and

(i) Integration of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities into the work programmes of the regional seas conventions and action plans.

III. CONCLUSIONS

15. The contributions by UNEP to global and regional environmental conventions, as described above, may be divided into nine categories: first, assessment and monitoring; second, technical support to the development of plans and strategies; third, building dialogue on key environmental policy issues; fourth, networking of organizations, institutions and experts at the global, regional and national levels; fifth, enlisting the support of industry, business and the scientific community in support of the objectives of the convention; sixth, development of guidelines and methodologies; seventh, provision of legal services; eighth, capacity building of a technical and scientific nature covering a broad range of environmental issues; and, ninth, public awareness and information.

16. The revitalized UNEP called for in the Nairobi Declaration should reinforce its efforts to use its scientific and technical expertise to catalyse and support the work of environmental conventions. By their nature, convention secretariats are not implementing bodies. Principal responsibility for the implementation of conventions lies with Governments. An international organization like UNEP can, however, summon the scientific and technical expertise to assist convention secretariats and Governments in achieving the objectives and goals of their conventions. While UNEP support to environmental conventions continues to be substantial, the Executive Director should enter into more structured discussions with conventions and their secretariats for exploring areas for enhancing interlinkages between UNEP and those conventions and agreements.